



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### PARCC ITEM DEVELOPMENT PROCUREMENT & ASSESSMENT DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. What will the PARCC tests look like (e.g. the system components, the design of each component)?

The PARCC assessment system will be comprised of a coherent set of diagnostic, informative, and summative assessment components in English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics for grades 3 through high school. The system will include the following components:

- **Diagnostic assessments in reading, writing and mathematics.** These optional diagnostic assessments will be available for teachers to use throughout the year and will be designed to pinpoint students' strengths and weaknesses relative to key areas of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). (The diagnostic assessments will be developed through separate procurements in 2012; they are not included in this procurement for item development.)
- **Mid-year assessments in ELA/literacy and mathematics.** Designed to be given approximately mid-way through the school year, these optional, informative assessments will be performance-based and will be similar in structure and design to PARCC's performance-based assessments that will contribute to a student's overall summative score. Educators will be able to use results from the mid-year assessments to help inform decisions about curriculum, instruction and professional development.
- **Performance-based assessments in ELA/literacy and mathematics.** All students participating in the PARCC assessments will take a performance-based assessment in which they will apply their knowledge to a complex problem and produce a product. It will be administered as close to the end of the school year as possible, and the results will be factored into a student's summative assessment score.
  - In ELA/literacy, the student will complete both a research simulation task and one focused on analyzing literature. The student will read multiple texts and write several pieces to demonstrate the ability to read and comprehend a range of sufficiently complex texts independently, to write effectively when using and analyzing sources, and to build and present knowledge through integration, comparison, and synthesis of ideas.
  - In mathematics, students will address a range of tasks focusing on application of concepts, skills and understandings. Students will be asked to solve problems involving the key knowledge and skills for their grade-level (as identified by the CCSS); express mathematical reasoning and construct a mathematical argument; and apply concepts to solve model real-world problems.

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- **End-of-year assessments in ELA/literacy and mathematics.** For all grades and subjects, this component will be administered at the end of the school year to all students participating in the PARCC assessments, with the results combined with the performance-based assessment results to produce a student's summative assessment score. The students will respond to computer-based machine-scorable questions to demonstrate their acquired skills and knowledge.
  - **In Grades 3-8,** the end-of-year assessments will focus on reading and comprehending complex texts in ELA/literacy. In mathematics, the assessments will focus on demonstrating conceptual understanding of the content of the grade/course, and demonstrating mathematical fluency, when applicable to the grade.
  - **In High School:** PARCC will create a series of End-of-Course (EOC) assessments in high school mathematics and End-of-Grade (EOG) assessments for ELA/literacy.
- **Speaking and listening component (ELA/literacy only).** All students participating in the PARCC assessments will be required to demonstrate speaking and listening proficiency using this tool, which will be designed to be administered anytime during the academic year. While this is a required component of the assessment, currently PARCC does not envision combining results from this component with those of the performance-based assessment or end-of-year assessment to determine the summative assessment score, although ultimately this will be a state decision. (The speaking and listening assessments will be developed through separate procurements in 2012; they are not included in this procurement for item development.)

## 2. How long will the test sessions on the PARCC assessments be?

Because the PARCC assessments will include new types of items, the exact length of test sessions has not been determined. PARCC states will use data gathered during item piloting and field testing to inform the structure and length of test sessions.

Overall, the goal is to streamline the system of assessments by enabling schools and/or districts to phase out some of the interim tests they currently use that may not be aligned with the summative assessments. The PARCC diagnostic and mid-year assessments will be able to serve these purposes and provide clear signals to educators, students, and parents about how students are doing relative to the CCSS and the summative PARCC tests.

## 3. What are the next steps in the development of the PARCC assessments?

This procurement – the Item Development ITN – will produce items for the PARCC mid-year, performance-based, and end-of-year assessment components. Future PARCC solicitations will build on this work by procuring several elements of the assessment system:

- The piloting and field testing of the items developed through this procurement;
- The building of test forms;
- The development of both the diagnostic and speaking and listening components of the PARCC assessment system; and
- Guidelines and policies for accessibility and accommodations for students with disabilities and English learners.

The items developed through this procurement will go through a number of reviews by PARCC state K-12 educators and higher education faculty, state department of education staff, and other key stakeholders to ensure that they reflect the content of the CCSS, are age-appropriate, and are culturally sensitive and free of bias. These items will be piloted and field tested in PARCC states beginning in 2013.

**4. Are the sample mathematics items in the ITN representative of what will be on the PARCC assessments? Why there are no sample ELA/literacy items?**

The task examples for mathematics included in the ITN are generally incomplete – prompts without rubrics, pre-existing source materials that partially align to the CCSS, or tasks that do not demonstrate the full range of innovative technology enhancements or accessibility features expected on the PARCC assessment tasks. These incomplete tasks were not intended as previews of complete future PARCC assessment tasks, nor are they representative of what will be on the PARCC assessments. Rather, each mathematics task provided was included in the ITN to demonstrate specific points for prospective contractors with PARCC. For example, some example items were included to illustrate terms and concepts, some to signal high priority or new content in the standards, some to inspire creativity in bidders' responses, and some to illustrate PARCC's interest in innovation in mathematics.

The PARCC states felt that the types of innovations called for in the ITN for ELA/literacy were described sufficiently to allow respondents to understand potential innovations, so item samples were not needed.

PARCC is working with two public research institutions to develop prototype assessment tasks in both mathematics and ELA/literacy, and these prototypes will be able to serve as a preview of future PARCC assessment tasks. As these prototype tasks are completed (likely in the summer of 2012), they will be available to better inform PARCC's item development and to be shared with the public.

**5. How is PARCC going to assess mathematics at the high school level?**

PARCC will create two series of end-of-course exams for high school mathematics – one for a traditional course sequence (e.g. Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II), and one for an integrated course sequence (e.g. Mathematics I, Mathematics II, Mathematics III). Each complete sequence will measure the full range of high school mathematics standards. States will have the option of choosing either sequence of end-of-course exams or to make both available to districts.

**6. How much will the PARCC assessments cost relative to what states are currently paying for state assessment programs?**

Current cost projections indicate that the cost per student for the PARCC assessments will be less than what most PARCC states currently spend per student on state assessments in mathematics and English language arts.

A survey conducted of the current cost of summative testing in the PARCC states shows a range across the states of anywhere from \$5 to \$30 per student per subject area, with a median of about \$14.50. PARCC anticipates that the summative components of the PARCC assessment system will be available to states for approximately \$11 per student for mathematics or ELA/literacy. The PARCC summative

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assessments will also provide three scores for students –in reading, writing, and mathematics – whereas many current state assessments only provide scores in reading and mathematics.

The early cost projections for administration of the PARCC assessments will continue to be refined over time as development of the tests continues and as the state-of-art in technology for automated scoring improves. It may be possible to achieve greater cost savings if a greater percentage of student responses can be scored using that technology.

## **7. What technology is needed to administer the PARCC assessments, and how will states get ready?**

The PARCC assessments will be administered and scored via computer for students in grades 6 through high school. For grades 3-5, the PARCC states plan to deliver the assessments via computer but have students respond to the assessment questions on paper and pencil, given potential concerns about younger students' keyboarding abilities. Before making a final determination about grades 3-5, research will be conducted to confirm the appropriate approach.

Administering and scoring the PARCC assessments via computer creates several significant opportunities for PARCC states:

- Producing real-time snapshots of students' knowledge at key points during the school year for key stakeholders;
- Reducing test administration costs (no shipping test booklets, etc);
- Using a range of innovative, interactive assessment items and tasks that are only possible to administer via computer;
- Reducing the cost of scoring extended response items and tasks and reducing the turnaround time for getting test results; and
- Using secure, open source and interoperable technology platforms that allow for ongoing updates and improvements to assessment system that match advances in technology over time.

These advantages will help the PARCC states realize significant cost savings but will also leverage the state-of-the-art in innovative tasks that engage students in the assessment process.

PARCC states are working together and with leading technology and educational technology experts from across the country to determine the range of computer devices that students might be able to use to take the PARCC assessments. PARCC's goal is that the assessments will be "device neutral" so that the test can be administered on a wide range of desktop computers, laptop computers, tablets, etc.

To help states and districts get ready for the transition to computer-based testing, PARCC is working on several tools to help states prepare:

- **Technology specifications guidance on recommended minimums for hardware, software, and bandwidth needed to administer the assessments.** The specifications for hardware will be released in early 2012; software, bandwidth and network specifications will be available later that year.
- **IT Readiness Tool to assess whether districts have the minimum hardware and bandwidth to administer the assessments.** States will work with their districts to use the tool, starting in the

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spring of 2012. This tool will provide states and districts with a “gap analysis” of their technology so that efforts to increase technology capacity can be targeted to the areas with greatest need. Leading up to the PARCC assessments in 2014-15, states and districts will be able to use the IT Readiness Tool several times to see how they are progressing towards readiness over time.

## **8. How is PARCC involving teachers in the development of the assessments?**

The PARCC item development process will be extensive and involve educators and community members from all PARCC states. Review committees will consist of PARCC state K-12 and higher education officials; local education agency K-12 staff and higher education faculty; and citizens and educators from various backgrounds. In the item development process, teachers will be directly engaged as reviewers on local educator teams and teams that review potential test questions for bias and sensitivity issues. Teachers on the review committees will be tasked with ensuring that PARCC items are free of bias, culturally sensitive, age-appropriate, content accurate, and well-aligned to the CCSS. Item and reading passage review meetings will begin for teachers in the spring of 2012, and will be designed to ensure that 100% of PARCC items are reviewed prior to and following field tests, in preparation for operational testing in the 2014-2015 school year.

PARCC is also engaging educators more broadly in the development of a number of resources for states and districts to use in the implementation of the CCSS and PARCC assessments, including the PARCC Model Content Frameworks, model instructional units, Educator Leader Cadres, diagnostic assessments, professional development modules, college-ready tools, and PARCC item and task prototypes. For more information on how educators can be involved in PARCC and plans to provide models and resources to help teachers bring the CCSS to life in their classrooms, please visit [www.parcconline.org/classroom](http://www.parcconline.org/classroom).

## **9. How will cut scores on the PARCC assessments be determined?**

The PARCC states will set standards (cut scores) for the various performance levels they will use to report results of the PARCC assessments during the summer of 2015 – after the first full administration of the PARCC assessments in all the member states. At the high school level, PARCC will identify a performance level in both ELA/literacy and mathematics that will indicate that a student is college- and career-ready. This level will serve as an anchor or reference point for articulating meaningful “on-track” performance levels for the earlier grades.

The standard-setting process that PARCC will use will build on the deep knowledge and experience of states through their past work in this area. That said, any process for setting standards anchored to external evidence of college and career readiness will need to be substantially different from traditional, strictly judgment-driven approaches to setting standards in use in many places today. Moreover, PARCC is working with postsecondary education faculty to establish a valid and meaningful standard of college and career readiness that reflects their actual expectations for student preparation.

The process to set the PARCC college- and career-ready standard will include professional judgment, analysis of data from higher education concurrent studies, data from higher education predictive studies, and data establishing the relationship between PARCC’s high school assessments and secondary exams administered in other countries to establish international comparisons. When the college- and career-ready standard has been set, PARCC will establish standards for earlier grades that indicate

whether students in earlier grades are on track to meet the readiness standard by the end of high school. This process will include a method to articulate the standards across grades and tests to ensure that performance expectations are coherent and provide a meaningful on-track signal to students, educators, and parents.

The PARCC Governing Board, comprised of the chief state school officers from all Governing States as well as three postsecondary education representatives from Governing States, has responsibility for making the final determination of the college- and career-ready standards and cut scores. The Governing Board's decision will be informed by recommendations from PARCC committees of assessment and content experts, research, expert opinion, and an analysis of the impact of recommended cut scores on students and institutions in member states.

**10. What assessment(s) will be used to determine college and career readiness, and how will those assessments be used by colleges & universities?**

The PARCC college-ready assessments are intended to signal whether first-time freshman at postsecondary institutions are ready to enter directly into first-year, credit-bearing courses in mathematics and English without the need for remediation. The college-ready assessments are not intended to be used for making admissions determinations, since that decision is dependent on the mission of the individual institution or system of higher education. PARCC states are committed to engaging state postsecondary leaders extensively in the development of college-ready assessments that accurately determine readiness for postsecondary credit-bearing courses.

To set a college-ready standard on the PARCC assessments that will ultimately be accepted and used by postsecondary institutions, PARCC will use evidence from research that might include such information as judgment studies by postsecondary faculty rating the relative importance of specific standards and items, concurrent validity studies that compare performance on PARCC assessments with college placement tests currently used by institutions and systems, and predictive validity studies that document the relationship between success on the PARCC assessments and success in first-year, credit-bearing courses. This research and ongoing collaboration between the K-12 and postsecondary communities in PARCC states will help PARCC develop college-ready assessments that can be used to determine whether students have met a standard that indicates whether they are prepared for entry-level, credit-bearing postsecondary coursework at the end of high school (or whether they are on track in the earlier grades).

**11. Will all states administer the PARCC diagnostic and mid-year components? How are those tests different from the interim/benchmark tests states & districts currently use? Who will determine whether to use them or not?**

PARCC will develop and make available all components of the assessment system to all member states. All states in PARCC will administer the PARCC speaking and listening, performance-based and end-of-year components, while they will have the option to determine how to use the diagnostic and mid-year components. Some states may decide to require all districts to use the diagnostic and mid-year components, while others may leave it up to schools and districts to decide whether and how they will use these assessments. In some cases, schools or districts may decide they want to require the use of these optional components, when others may simply provide them as a resource for educators. Each state will make the determination based on the needs of the state's schools and districts.

Much like the various interim and benchmark tests in use in most schools and districts today, the PARCC diagnostic and mid-year assessments will be designed to provide information to teachers, parents, and students at key points throughout the year about whether students are progressing, relative to the CCSS and whether they need additional support or enrichment in particular areas. The PARCC diagnostic and mid-year assessments, however, will be closely aligned to the CCSS – and to the summative PARCC assessments. This means they will complement the summative assessments and create a more streamlined and coherent set of assessment tools for educators, students, and parents. Just as the CCSS articulate what content should be taught and what can be let go, the suite of PARCC assessments can help states and districts to streamline the various existing – and often disconnected – tests in use today.

## **12. How will the PARCC assessments be accessible to students with disabilities and English language learners?**

PARCC is committed to providing all students with equitable access to high-quality, 21<sup>st</sup> century PARCC assessments and attending to the unique assessment needs of students with disabilities (SWD) and English learners (ELs). From the initial design stages, PARCC is considering how its assessments will be accessible to all participating students, including SWD and ELs. Accessible assessments will allow all individuals taking the tests to participate and engage in a meaningful and appropriate manner, with the goal of ensuring that results are valid for each and every student. The PARCC assessment system will increase access to all participating students by adhering to Universal Design principles and embedding supports from the initial stages of item development.

PARCC is guided by the following key principles for designing accessible assessments:

- Minimize/eliminate features of the assessment that are irrelevant to what is being measured, so that all students can more accurately demonstrate their knowledge and skills;
- Measure the full range of complexity of the standards;
- Design each component of the assessment in a manner that allows ELs and students with disabilities to demonstrate what they know and can do;
- Use Universal Design to create accessible assessments throughout every stage and component of the assessment, including items/tasks, passages, performance tasks, graphics and performance-based tasks; and
- Use technology to make all components of the assessment as accessible as possible.

To guide item development, PARCC will create accessibility guidelines for items/tasks, stimuli, passages, and graphics. During item development, careful consideration will be paid to various student learner characteristics in order to increase item accessibility and minimize barriers for meaningful participation in the assessment system. Items developed for the PARCC assessment will also undergo extensive review for issues of accessibility, bias, and cultural sensitivity. PARCC's Core Leadership Review Team (PARCC state K-12 and higher education officials) and Local Educator Review Teams (local education agency K-12 staff and higher education faculty) will include representatives from the SWD and EL communities. PARCC will also hold a Bias and Sensitivity review to ensure increased access for all participating students. The reviewers will be tasked with ensuring that PARCC items are free of bias, culturally sensitive, age-appropriate, content accurate, and well-aligned to the CCSS.



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PARCC will also adopt a common protocol for standardizing the file format of test items and the information contained in student personal needs profiles. These common standards accomplish three important goals. First, they allow accessibility information to be embedded in digital test items and allow those items to be moved across compliant test item banks. Second, the standards provide a method for specifying the accessibility needs of each individual student and storing those needs in an access profile. Finally, the standards for item information and access-needs profile provide a test delivery interface with all the information and resources required to make a test item accessible for students with a variety of disabilities and special needs.

Understanding that issues of accessibility must be considered at the initial design stages, PARCC has developed two standing working groups comprised of PARCC state leaders and national experts committed to providing operational and technical guidance to PARCC around issues related to fairness, SWD, and ELs. By focusing on issues of accessibility, accommodations, and fairness at the inception of the assessment and throughout the entire development process, PARCC will be able to create widely accessible assessments.

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*For more information about PARCC, please visit [www.parcconline.org](http://www.parcconline.org).*